

# The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



May 15, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Late last week we received the news that Governor Tom Wolf is moving to the “yellow phase” all the counties that comprise our diocese, effective today.

As we all know, “yellow” means “caution.” The virus is still with us. It is still potent. It is silent and invisible and still possesses the ability to be easily spread, even by those who are not sick themselves. As a result, I ask all of us to move with deliberate care as we consider what may be possible for our common life in the coming weeks and months.

In conversations with parish and diocesan leadership, I have noted an emerging consensus that the status quo will remain in place for some time to come. Many clergy have said that they do not intend to open their churches while we remain under the “yellow phase,” while others have phrased the matter in terms of an indefinite future. As I have read some of their letters to their parishioners, I have been impressed by the prayerful discernment, clear direction, and pastoral concern for the people of God that they evince. I am deeply grateful for the collaborative leadership exhibited by our priests and deacons, and I know this collaboration also exists in the relationships between our clergy and the lay leadership of our parishes.

In this time of continuing patience it is appropriate for us all to look forward, and to imagine what safely re-opening might eventually look like. Accordingly, the Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Response has drafted guidelines that may be accessed on our diocesan website at [www.episcopalpgh.org/reopening-plan/](http://www.episcopalpgh.org/reopening-plan/). They contain protocols and best practices that are necessary to prepare our congregations and our buildings for the changes that lie ahead; to maintain cleanliness and hygiene; to worship and administer the sacraments without the risk of viral transmission; to ensure safe-distancing among those who will again gather together under our roofs; and to provide alternative means of worship and involvement for those who remain at home. These guidelines and protocols are the result of broad input, and have been reviewed by the clergy and the Standing Committee of the diocese.

Under these guidelines, I ask every parish to develop a draft plan for how it can safely proceed, and to submit that plan to my office well in advance of any re-opening they may be considering. In particular, I ask the leadership of each parish to address in writing the seven major questions found in the Guidelines on page 4, after they have had a chance to review the specific practices in each category and consider how they will implement them. The Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Response will review these replies, and may make suggestions for further consideration. They will then forward the parish plan with their comments to me. With these in hand, I will then have a conversation with the priest and/or warden, to clear up any questions and offer my support.

We are all yearning to gather again face-to-face, in person and not only on a screen. However, we need to ensure that we can do so safely. In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul asks us to have the mind of Christ, *to look to each other's interests, not only to our own (Philippians 2:4-5)*. In this spirit, we must hold on with patience for some considerable time longer, even as the leaders of our congregations take the time necessary to draw up safe plans for our future. As we bear with this time together, please keep in prayer as always those most in need: the sick and the vulnerable, the dying and the departed, first-responders, caregivers and those who seek a vaccine and a cure. Let us move in faith through Eastertide toward the Ascension, Pentecost, and beyond, knowing that we are always in the care of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, who has conquered death and gives us new life.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dorsey", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.  
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh